

# INTERNATIONAL STREET-PAPERS EDITION GROUNDCOVER

NEWS AND SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUND UP

SUMMER 2013

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## INSIDE

- Street kid soccer – p. 2
- Coffee karma – p. 2
- Landfill instruments – p. 3
- Taking responsibility – p. 4
- Girls in Pakistan – p. 4
- Teen photographers – p. 5
- Noel of Ireland – p. 6
- Nicolai from the Ukraine – p. 7
- Vendors get breaks – p. 7
- Greeks forego heat – p. 8
- Homeless criminals? – p. 9
- Robot home aides – p. 10
- Aging in Japan – p. 11
- Child poverty in the EU – p. 11
- Homebuilding in D.C. – p. 15
- Rude Vietnamese cops – p. 15
- Syrian refugees – p. 16





## These kids have won already - street football in Pakistan

by Zofeen Ebrahim  
IPS, 4/15/2013

Oblivious to the cloud of dust they have kicked up in just a few minutes, panting and sweating, moving lithely, this way, then that, they jostle the ball smoothly until one team scores a goal. There's a loud cheer. Wiping the sweat off his brow, young Iman Hussain throws up his hands in frustration, looks with displeasure at the scoreboard, and shouts: "Concentrate, you guys!"

Just 12, Hussain is among a motley group of boisterous young boys who are having a practice match of football at one of Karachi Municipal Council (KMC) sports complex grounds in Karachi. Of all sizes, and aged between 10 and 16, they have been selected after Karachi-wide trials to form the Street Strikers. It will be among teams from

20 countries to compete for the 2014 Street Child World Cup, to be held in Rio de Janeiro, in Brazil.

Clad in a black-and-red striped T-shirt, black shorts, knee-high black socks and shoes, Hussain is known for his agility, but as much for his temper. "They like my passing and that is why I have been chosen for the team," he told IPS proudly.

Hussain, till a few years ago, was a deft pickpocket, living off the streets of Karachi. He is among Pakistan's 1.2 million to 1.5 million children living on the streets. He had run away from home when he was just seven because his older brother used to "tie him up" and beat him blue for not "paying attention to studies." Son of a fisherman, he has five brothers and six sisters.

Today, he has been reintegrated back into his family, has joined school, and counts football among his foremost passions. "I want to show the world I am good at something!" he said, adding a little excitedly: "It will be my first time on an airplane!"

The initiative was taken by Azad Foundation (AF), a non-governmental organisation that has been working for Karachi's street children since 2001. They provide meals, shelter, healthcare and education through three



Street children in Karachi prepare for their World Cup next year.  
Photo: Zofeen Ebrahim/IPS

drop-in centres to close to 3,500 of Karachi's over 12,000 street children. Currently, a little over 100 among them are going through various stages of a rehabilitation process, and will finally get reintegrated.

Since the beginning of the year, AF has started a five-year Sports for Development project. "In Karachi, we are working in three [of the 18 administrative units] and in the rest of the three provinces, we are collaborating with organisations

already working with street children," Ali Bilgrami, who heads the sports project, told IPS. "Initially, we will focus on football, but if there is demand for other sports we can always include cricket and hockey." However, he emphasised, it will have to be a team sport.

Itfan Maqbool, spokesperson for AF, hopes the World Cup will help in "educating society to the realities of

see FOOTBALL, page 14

### GROUNDCOVER MISSION:

*Groundcover News exists to create opportunity and a voice for low-income people while taking action to end homelessness and poverty.*

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## Coffee with a heart : paying it forward

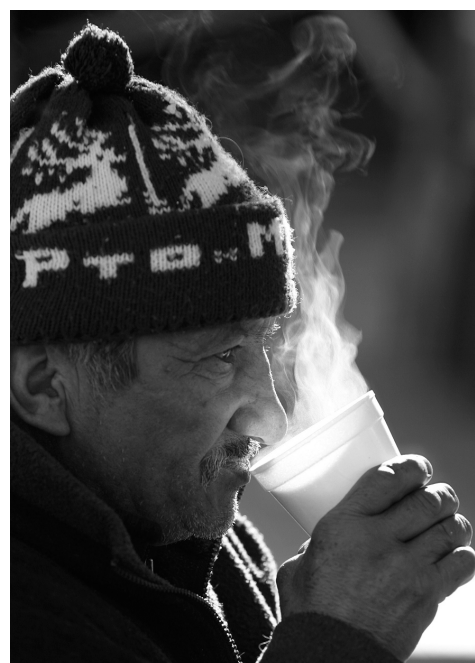
by Amy Mackinnon  
INSP, 4/15/2013

With the global economic downturn pushing more and more people into poverty, "caffè sospeso," a century-old tradition from the cafés of Naples, is re-emerging to give marginalised people some comfort and kindness.

"Caffè sospeso" may sound like the latest form of caffeine hit, but this new type of coffee will leave you feeling warm inside in more ways than one.

Literally meaning "suspended coffee," the tradition can be traced back over 100 years to the working class cafés of Naples, Italy. Then, customers who experienced good luck paid for their own coffee but they would also buy another one and say "suspended" to the barista. This was noted and the coffee would be made available free of charge to someone who was homeless or had fallen on hard times.

The idea began to wane during Italy's "dolce vita" boom years, but now, in the midst of the economic downturn, the "caffè sospeso" concept has caught imaginations worldwide. Thanks to



A homeless man drinks coffee in downtown Valparaiso, about 75 miles northwest of Santiago. Photo by Eliseo Fernandez

social media, the idea is spreading rapidly and has been taken up by cafés across the world including by businesses in nations such as the USA, Bulgaria and Canada.

In Ireland, John Sweeny, a 28-year-

old plumber from Cork, set up the "Suspended Coffees" Facebook page and within days the page had attracted tens of thousands of followers worldwide. John has since been inundated with messages from supporters and other cafés hoping to implement the initiative.

Sweeny said: "I didn't go to bed until 4 a.m. and was up at 8:15 a.m. It's not just an idea for the homeless. I've been in situations where I've been out of work, freezing, and would have loved nothing more than a cup of coffee, but couldn't afford one."

Sweeny has designed a "Suspended Coffee Supporter" logo for participating cafés to display in their windows. A suspended coffees website and smartphone app is also under development.

It was through John's Facebook page that Frances Brown Stewart, owner of Stewart's Café in Glasgow, first heard of the idea. Stewart said: "We've often talked about how to do something

see PAYING, page 3



## Music from rubbish



In Cateura, an area close to Asunción, the capital of Paraguay, a group of young people play Mozart, Beethoven, Vivaldi or "Yesterday" by The Beatles with instruments manufactured with recycled material from the landfill of the same neighbourhood of Cateura. Photo: Courtesy of Hecho en Buenos Aires

by **Romina Resuche**  
**Hecho en Buenos Aires**  
– **Argentina**

An old oil can has been transformed into a cello, a fork rescued from rubbish supports strings on a violin and spoon handles act as keys on a saxophone.

This is not a description of a fantasy world or a tale from a children's story. These are instruments played for real by the Recycled Instruments Orchestra in Cateura, an area some six kilometres from Asunción almost entirely built on a landfill site where the majority of inhabitants work in recycling.

For five years, a group of some 40 young people have been part of a project that aims to make music by

constructing alternative string instruments made from resources found on the landfill.

The orchestra plays both classical and pop music at venues where they are often given standing ovations. They have already played in Panama, Brazil, Germany and Switzerland, and in Colombia they played the same theatre as Lady Gaga. The bass player from Megadeth – David Ellefson – is a confessed fan and recently gave them signed guitar plectrums as a gift, while René from Puerto Rican band Calle 13 is another devotee.

When you search for Cateura in Google, the first thing that appears is information about the orchestra. The

story of this group of children, teachers and mentors, highlights the new life they all lead since taking advantage of waste and making music from recycled materials.

It was Favio Sánchez who – whilst working as an environmental technician at the Cateura landfill site – gave up his free time to teach local youngsters how to play music, one of his passions.

During his teenage years, Sanchez chose to do an engineering degree in human ecology and he later went on to study philosophy. When he began teaching music to the children of Cateura, he said it was "a way to establish relationships and earn the trust of the families of the recyclers," with whom he worked on the recycling project.

Previously, Cateura was known for its rubbish tip, uncleanness and prevailing marginalisation, but today the area is famous for its orchestra and for music changing the lives of almost 40 people.

According to Sánchez, music creates empathy, confidence and cooperation amongst children and, in turn, their parents. Once his group started on the landfill site, friends and neighbours also became involved in fine-tuning the project. Along the way, the eco-development organisation Sánchez worked for, Alter Vida – an organization dedicated to a sustainable Paraguay – considered teaching music to landfill children as part of their technical work, which led to classes being held within its centre for waste collection. Teachers were then brought in and instruments donated.

Then one day, Nicolás Gómez, alias El Colá – one of the workers at Cateura with experience in carpentering – realised the orchestra's need for more instruments and offered to assist by building them with whatever materials he could find. In the beginning, the instruments made were educational and simple but after Gomez trained in stringed instrument construction, he built the first-ever violin from recycled materials.

Working with Sánchez, Gomez continued to try out different materials and shapes in order to build various instruments and then they realised they had an infinite source of materials from the landfill site.

"We started to look in the piles of rubbish as that was where we would find the materials that would be of use," Sánchez explained. "I am this orchestra's first musical instrument producer. I now have a workshop in my house and we have already made lots of violins," said Gómez. "I have access to the landfill, so I go in and look for materials... sometimes I'm successful, others not..."

When asked how sound is maintained and how instruments are taken care of, Gomez replied while showing us a violin whose shell was made of tin. He said: "You have to tighten the casing well so that it doesn't move at all...if it moves then it will make a different sound altogether. Recently I have been making a living from this, although I am still a rubbish collector."

see **MUSIC**, page 13

## Paying it forward, one cup at a time

continued from page 2

like this, so when I heard about the 'suspended coffee' idea it seemed so perfect."

The initiative quickly caught on and within a couple of days the small coffee shop had received £60 worth of suspended coffees and Stewart already has plans to expand the idea.

"We're going to do it for food as well. We're even thinking of setting up a PayPal account so that people can donate that way. I have family down in England who are excited by the idea and want to give.

"It takes away the prejudice – I think often people want to give to persons in need. But there are lots of stereotypes, people think that they might not use it for coffee or food. This way the café acts as a go-between. Like a coffee or food bank.

"I want to get away from the idea that people need to go to segregated places to be offered a coffee or some food. I feel it is really important that people are able to come into the café and be part of things – this is also about Inclusion."

Critics of the scheme have suggested it could be abused but Stewart believes in good faith.

"We won't be asking anyone for proof of their status if they ask for a suspended coffee. We'll take it at face value; I can't imagine anyone would abuse that. If someone comes in here and asks for something – they'll get it."

So far the idea has mainly been taken up by small, independently-owned coffee shops such as Stewart's, but the big chains are now taking notice.

Starbucks UK is the first major outlet to

implement the idea, albeit in a slightly amended format: customers will be able to purchase a suspended coffee but instead of it being available in-store for local persons in need, coffee of the same value will be provided to the community-charity Oasis, which will distribute it to community hubs throughout the UK.

Ian Cranna, vice-president of marketing at Starbucks UK, said the chain would match the value of each suspended coffee purchased in a cash donation to Oasis, adding the company wanted to create a "structured and long-term" initiative that gets "help straight to those who want and need it the most."

Source: [www.streetnewsservice.org](http://www.streetnewsservice.org)



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## Breaking the criminal cycle



Franklin Esauesau and Karina Andersen. Photo by Jonathan Kyriakou.

by Emma McGarrity

The Big Issue South Africa, 4/15/2013

After losing her partner in a car crash, Karina Andersen started the organisation The SmilingOne Foundation (SOF), which aims to rehabilitate some of South Africa's most violent prisoners. The programme provides guidance and a support network for inmates and gives them the opportunity to train as coaches.

With the highest incarceration rate on the African continent, South Africa's prisons are full to the brim

with men trapped in a cycle of gangs, crime and repeat offending. But far from affording them the opportunity to redeem themselves, the country's prisons – often sardonically referred to as “Universities of Crime” – offer little in the way of rehabilitation.

Indeed few inmates ever try to break the criminal cycle through a self-help programme, but Karina Andersen – a career and personal development coach and founder of SOF – hopes to change that.

She said: “I was inspired to create the SOF after going through a journey of personal understanding when I lost a partner in a car accident 11 years ago. That led to the writing of my book, “The Responsible Individual,” and later a self-facilitated programme.

“While I was writing my book, a social worker from Brandvlei Correctional Centre near Worcester got in touch and proposed I meet with a group of inmates. In November of 2007, I went to the prison for the first time and told the inmates about The Responsible Individual (TRI) programme I'd created. The guys were sceptical but agreed to try it, and we got the programme running through the SOF in 2008.

“We invite inmates to go on a conscious journey to revisit the choices they have made and by which they have limited themselves. Many people don't understand that within every reaction there is a choice, both to understand and undo old patterns and to bring peace back into their lives. The programme provides guidance and a support network for inmates, but change can only lie in the hands of the individual.”

Inmates who complete the programme

are also given the opportunity to train as coaches which requires a minimum of three years' training. Currently there are 30 men undertaking coach training, Andersen said, four of whom are on parole and working full time for SOF.

Parolees who train as coaches are assigned to work with others released from prison during their reintegration into society.

“The SmilingOne Foundation's most important investment area is those first six months of reintegration after an inmate is released from prison, because this is the time when he either makes or breaks it,” Andersen said.

“Around 230 inmates have completed the programme to date. We reached seven prisons in the Western Cape last year but this year we're active in only four, because we had to cut back due to a lack of funding. Funding is what we urgently need to expand the programme and reach more prisons. For the first five years I funded it out of my own pocket, but now we need corporates and individuals to help.”

Anderson said she is often asked why the foundation only operates the TRI programme in men's prisons and not in

see REINTEGRATING, page 13

## Girls of the wild frontiers of Pakistan

by Alasdair Soussi

The Big Issue in the North – UK, 1/23/2012

Adversity, hardship and personal risk may not be everybody's idea of a fulfilling work-life, but for Maryam Bibi it comes with the territory. A chief executive of a women's charity in the volatile city of Peshawar, the capital of Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Province, Bibi has been committed to improving the lot of women and girls in the Islamic republic's rural and notoriously hostile tribal communities since she established her non-governmental organisation (NGO) Khwendo Kor in 1993.

For Bibi, the threat of death is a daily part of life in this most ancient of cities, which, trapped on the frontline of a Taliban-led insurgency, lies on the edge of Pakistan's tribal belt near the Afghan border.

“It has been always dangerous here but recently the danger has multiplied due to the war on terror, drone attacks and military operations,” said Bibi, who, over the last three years, has secured



Pashtun girls stand near their family home in Peshawar. Photo: REUTERS/Fayaz Aziz

two degrees from the University of York.

“Fear is driving everyone, everywhere. The fragile security situation and poor law and order have led to increased kidnappings, suicide attacks, targeted killings and an economic crisis. It seems as if the people are left alone because all the security machinery is engaged in securing those who are well to do, the ministers, and so on.

“There are many examples where authorities openly accept they are not in a position to provide security to NGOs and constantly advise them to stop or limit the area of their work.”

Khwendo Kor (KK) – meaning Sister's Home in Pashto, the language spoken along Pakistan's northwest frontier – has been active in KP Province (formerly known as the North West

Frontier Province) for the past 18 years. With increasing access to education, better healthcare and job creation among its top priorities, KK has spent much of this near two decades, “helping and facilitating communities – women and children in particular – to reclaim their own basic rights” in a region of Pakistan known for its strong cultural traditions and deep-seated religious adherence to its Islamic heritage.

“I come from Waziristan and I understand the situation of women in that part of my country,” explained the widowed mother of four, who was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize as part of the “1,000 Women for Peace” in 2005. “I was fortunate to become educated and the credit for that goes to my father, who, as someone who was exposed to educated people himself, was courageous enough to educate his daughters.

“However, even as an educated person I understood how difficult it was to think for yourself as a tribal woman. I only wanted to work, and not have to be dependent on others just because

see PAKISTAN, page 12



# Escaping poverty through photography

by Micky Seifert  
FREIEBÜRGER – Germany, 8/20/2012

Founded in 2006, the concept behind “FairMail” is simple: selling postcards with images from the developing world taken by local, teenage photographers who get to keep their fair share of the profits. In contrast to other card series, where the pictures are snapped by western photographers, printed in the west and marketed by western companies, postcards from FairMail keep the money where the images are. For example, if the pictures are taken in India, then local young photographers, regional printing houses and national tax authorities all profit, along with local exporters who send their cards out to customers all around the world.

FairMail was founded in Peru by Dutch duo, Janneke Smeulders and Peter den Hond. They were running a vegetarian restaurant and, in their free time, volunteering in a hostel for street children and a community centre based at a landfill site in Trujillo. While working with young people, Janneke noticed that other volunteers were constantly taking photographs of these youngsters without ever letting them near their cameras, for fear of their equipment being damaged. Janneke then decided that the next time she worked there she would bring a digital camera to show the young people how to take photographs themselves.

The young people enjoyed being taught how to take their own digital photographs and were excited with the results. But Janneke was still unsatisfied. Even if she was able to teach these young people a new hobby, they would still get frustrated with it in the end, because they would never have the money to buy cameras of their own. This wasn't, then, a way of helping them escape poverty. So Janneke and Peter then came upon the idea that they could give the young people an introduction to digital photography but then get them to choose their own images, photograph them and ultimately print them on postcards which could then be sold. In this way, they could combine the fun they have in taking photographs with a potential income from the sale of postcards.

In 2006 the first five young Peruvians took the photography course, and this was the beginning of the Peruvian company FairMail.

FairMail rejects the idea of simply offering support, financial or otherwise. Instead, the photographers' own success gives them the boost they need to

progress further.

After receiving the BiD Network's “Business in Development Challenge” prize in September 2006, FairMail began selling their postcards in Dutch One World stores. In the spring of 2007, Janneke and Peter decided to extend their idea across the whole world. Their aim was that by 2012 there would be three countries where pictures were taken and postcards produced, and six countries where the postcards were sold.

The Netherlands were chosen as the distribution country for the products which came from different countries. Up to 2011 they came from Peru and India, and since then cards have also come from Morocco.

In September 2007 the company FairMail International was founded to enable the distribution of FairMail picture postcards. 90 percent of the cards are sold in ordinary shops and specialist developing-world shops in Holland, England, Germany and Belgium, the other 10 percent in the countries of their production, mostly Peru.

The photographs on the cards have been taken by young people from Peru and India, who all come from relatively poor backgrounds. In Peru, FairMail works with former street children or with young people whose families earn their living by collecting and selling recyclable items from the landfill site in Trujillo. The young people they work with in India come from the Nagwa slum district of Varanasi, where many people earn a living by collecting cow dung to be used for heating.

FairMail works in partnership with local groups who look after vulnerable young people. These groups, because of their proximity to the young people, are in the best position to find those youngsters who could really use an opportunity in life. In Peru it's the Mundo de Ninos (a home for street children) and ACJ El Milagro (the community centre at the landfill site); in India it's the Dunya Foundation (an education project in the Nagwa slum district).

Whenever a vacancy arises at FairMail, young people between the ages of 13 and 15 from these institutions can apply. These arrangements link well with the institutions' caring role.

At first, the young people who have been chosen serve a kind of probationary period, where their sense



Behind this concept is the idea of fair mail, postcards with motifs from the developing world to sell, with countries where the motifs occur, should have a fair share of the profits. Photo courtesy FREIEBÜRGER

of responsibility, their motivation and their photographic talents are tested. After a month, the young people with the best “qualifications” get the job. “Through this way of working we make sure that we are working with young people who have had no opportunities up to that point, but have the will and personal determination to improve their lives.”

For each postcard the young photographer sells, they are given 50 percent of the profit. If their pictures are well-received, their income will increase. The money is paid into the respective young person's personal education account. With this, the young person can finance his or her education, and is allowed to use up to 25 percent to improve his or her living conditions. In addition, FairMail provides the equivalent of 10 Euros for health insurance for the photographers and their next of kin. On top of that they get paid an hourly rate for packing, and they can spend this as they please. In the first half of 2010 this amounted to an average income which was 157 percent of subsistence income in Trujillo, Peru, and 168 percent in Varanasi, India.

FairMail International is not an aid organisation or a foundation. It is a business, which works to the principle “Trade not Aid.” The young people trained by FairMail are supposed, through hard work, creative involvement, and the creation of a product which people really want to buy, to look after themselves. FairMail reject the idea of simply offering support, financial or otherwise. They are convinced that making people dependent on support has a negative influence on young people and their development. But if you give them the help they need to progress and reach their goals by themselves,

you'll give them self-confidence. The photographers' own success gives them the boost they need to progress further.

FairMail doesn't receive financial subsidies or grants; the company finances itself entirely from the proceeds of its postcard sales. The young people quickly become a part of the company's way of conducting business. They learn very quickly that their income is dependent on the profits the company makes, so they are motivated to keep costs low and profit high. This is the only way to earn enough money to complete their education. They treat cameras and computers very carefully, and are sparing in their use of electricity.

FairMail fulfills the criteria for Fair Trade, because FairMail is recognised by the Dutch Association of World Shops (LWW) and is a regulated member of the World Fair Trade Organisation. The LWW has a strict set of criteria for the sale of non-food, fair trade products from developing countries in their so-called Third World stores. Membership of the WFTO is limited to those organisations who can demonstrate a 100 percent commitment to Fair Trade and fulfill the 10 Principles of Fair Trade (this includes paying their employees more than subsistence-level wages and offering further benefits such as health insurance for young people and their families.)

So, FairMail is something worth supporting. Both the young people and the company are profiting. And when you buy their cards you know that the regions where the images came from are also getting some benefit from it.

*Translated from the German by Peter Bone.*

Source: [www.streetnewsservice.org](http://www.streetnewsservice.org)



## Vendor Spotlight: Noel, a quiet hero

by Jennifer May

Ireland's Big Issue, 3/18/2013

Some people are a pleasure to talk to; upbeat, happy and eternally optimistic without being annoying – and Noel McCauley is one of these. A conversation with him leaves you feeling hopeful, lightened somehow, and renews your faith in your fellow man. He's like the Christmas Spirit personified – is Noel – refusing to let life's difficulties get him down.

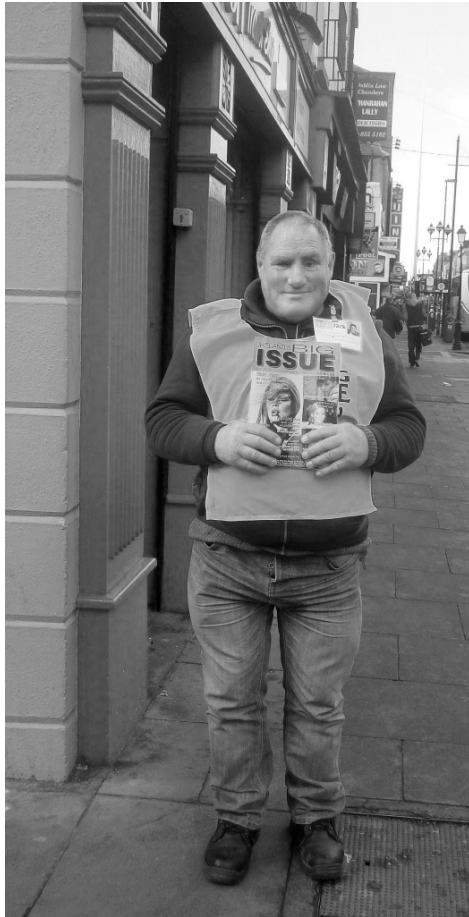
So it's no wonder that he has forged out such a brilliant network of friends and dedicated followers on the streets of Enniskillen, Galway and Sligo, where he has been selling the Ireland's Big Issue – with the same verve and determination that he gives to everything – since 1996.

Born in Donegal in 1946, Noel was the third youngest of eleven children. His father was a farmer, raising dairy cattle, as well as growing barley, corn and potatoes. "My father was a great man for the spuds," says Noel. "We exported them all over the world to countries like Spain, Egypt and Israel. We all pulled our weight on the farm, but I had a very good childhood."

Until he was five years old Noel had pretty good sight, but it then began to deteriorate rapidly, and by the time he was six and a half, Noel was blind. (His mother had rubella before he was born and it was this that caused his sight loss.) You would imagine that losing your sight would be devastating for a little boy, but Noel and his family took a pragmatic approach towards his vision loss, never treating him as if he had a disability, and just getting on with things – something he has done his whole life.

"I found it fairly easy because I was young," he says. "Children of that age can adapt to anything. My mother was a very understanding woman and still is – she never kept me in, never made my disability, to coin a phrase, 'a big issue', never said Noel can't do this or Noel can't do that, and I appreciated her for that."

From the age of seven, Noel attended a school outside Belfast for blind and partially-sighted children, and his memories of that are happy ones. Leaving at 16, he worked for a time in Cork doing basket work, but only stuck it out for six months, knowing that it wasn't for him. ("Sure I was only 16," he smiles, "picking my way through life and trying to find out what it was I wanted.") This was a time in Ireland where opportunities for disabled people were limited; a time where there was



**Ireland's Big Issue vendor Noel McCauley.**  
Photo courtesy of Ireland's Big Issue.

no equality legislation to ensure that all employment or educational choices were available to anyone regardless of their disability. However, Noel didn't let this get him down, returning instead to work on the family farm, while searching for other options.

Never one to let the grass grow under his feet, in 1981 he then found employment in Letterkenny in a manufacturing company, and it was there he met his life-long friend and companion Madeline, who has been a source of great joy to him ever since. "Madeline has been my friend for 31 years," he smiles. "She is a very trustworthy friend and goes everywhere with me, helps me with my housework and reads me the paper. When I left for Sligo she came with me and still lives around the corner."

In 1985, always a keen sportsman, Noel trained for and represented Ireland in the Special Olympics, winning a silver medal for the 800 Metres, bronze for the Long Jump and coming fourth place in the shot put. On his return he was nominated as "handicapped sportsperson of the year" in Donegal with a special presentation held in his honour. "I always wondered what it was like to come out as part of a team and represent your country, and the Special Olympics gave me the chance to find out," he remembers. "People cheering you on the field and cheering you from all directions – it's a great experience."

For people without disabilities, the

idea of leaving home and all they are familiar with can be a daunting one, but Noel has always risen to any challenge, so in 1987, on hearing that there were opportunities for blind people to train as telephonists, Noel applied for the course held in NCBI, Sligo, the only place where it was being run. He traveled down for the interview and was subsequently offered a place. "My mother asked me what I was going to do," Noel laughs. "I said I was going to pack my bags and go. That was the second of January; by the 31<sup>st</sup> of March I was in Sligo and I have been here ever since. It's a second home to me now."

When Noel's training as a telephonist became obsolete, due to the automation of the system, he spent a number of years unemployed, but didn't allow himself to become depressed and instead kept searching for new opportunities. In 1996, on hearing that there might be a place working the switchboard in Ireland's Big Issue office in Sligo, he applied, but on being told there was a long waiting list, was offered instead the chance to sell the magazine. "They told me that Frank (Guickan) was looking for someone to sell the magazine, so I said, well, I'll do that," Noel laughs.

"I would encourage anyone to go selling The Big Issue, because it will definitely turn your life around."

Working out a clever way of folding the magazine in its folder, so he'd know that he was holding it the right way up, Noel took himself off to Sligo, and he says came back at five o'clock with £12.50 in his pocket, the first money he had earned in a number of years. "I thought this was marvelous," he grins. "It took off from there and I've never looked back."

Over the years people have been more than receptive to Noel and he has made many friends through selling the magazine. "It is great and has given me a me outlook on life," says Noel, whose eternal optimism and faith in his fellow man is astonishing. "I've made a lot of friends – people know me now personally who would never have known me before."

Even the rather nasty Irish weather doesn't bother him ("I've a farming background," he laughs; "It's an outdoor life anyway"), and he happily travels between Sligo, Enniskillen and Galway selling the magazine, as well as recruiting a small team of other sellers to work with him.

Noel has often offered the hand of friendship to homeless people he meets on the streets, and says he has noticed an increase in the numbers of those homeless and destitute in recent years. "Homelessness has definitely increased," he concedes. "It is mostly down to government cutbacks – especially in the area of rent allowance – where people are forced onto the streets. I feel so sorry for them."

If there is any doubt in people's minds that selling Ireland's Big Issue doesn't offer a way out for people, Noel's experience should dispel those doubts completely. Not only has it changed his life on a personal level, made new friends and given his everyday a purpose, but he has also managed to save enough money to purchase his own home, albeit with help from his family.

"I don't drink and don't smoke, so I started to save my money and with family and friends behind me was able to purchase my own home," he explains. "Selling Ireland's Big Issue helped me achieve that goal – I could never have done that without it. Even today I find it great as it keeps those long winter months turning." He adds: "I've had a great life and I've never been badly treated. I would encourage anyone to go selling the Big Issue, because it will definitely turn your life around; I am proof positive of that. For me it's a breath of fresh air."

Source: [www.streetnewsservice.org](http://www.streetnewsservice.org)

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## Vendor Spotlight: Nicolai Romanov in Ukraine

by Nikolai Romanov

The Way Home – Ukraine, 12/10/2012

### Road to Ruin

When I was younger I graduated from the Odessa Polytechnical Institute and received my diploma as an engineer. I then worked in the “Stal’kanat” factory in Odessa. During the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the business was closed and I became unemployed.

A few years went by where I did casual jobs, and then I became friends with people who sold homemade alcohol. My life changed in some ways and I started to use alcohol regularly. Normally after work I went to a café with friends and we would share a bottle of vodka between the three of us and get drunk.

With each passing day we drank more and more. I would always arrive home in a very bad state, I constantly argued with my wife, sometimes we fought. This all happened in front of our children. Sergei and Oksana were afraid of me and didn’t speak to me.

One day some friends and I were sitting in a café and someone from another table injured our friend. We went outside to talk with them, and they started a fight. When the police arrived on the scene only myself and one other person were still there and they started to fight with us. They beat me badly and I could not escape. I was taken to the police office and all the blame for the



Nicolai Romanov, Ukrainian vendor.

fight was placed on my shoulders.

I was forced to sign a statement but I still wasn’t sober so didn’t read it properly. It turned out that as well as the fight, a burglary was being hung on me as well. My friends refused to help me. All of the money I had, I spent on a lawyer, but he couldn’t help me. I was sent to prison for eight years.

After six years I was released for good behaviour, but things weren’t well with me. I had contracted tuberculosis in prison and my wife had left me and thrown me out of our communal apartment. My parents died a long time

ago. I asked for help from close relatives but nobody wanted anything to do with a former prisoner, ill with tuberculosis. So I ended up on the street. I lived in the basement of a multi-storeyed house with other people in the same situation.

### Finding “The Way Home”

In order to get my documents back, someone told me to contact the centre of records and registration fund, The Way Home. There I found out that there was the possibility to earn money legally selling the newspaper The Way Home on the streets of the city. I went to the editor of the newspaper to find out if I could sell the paper. I have now been selling The Way Home for three years on the streets of Odessa. During this time, lawyers helped me to get my documentation back and I received my passport and identification code.

I also found a new girlfriend and we moved in together. We live in the suburbs of Odessa – the village of Nerubayskoe. I take care of the chores, do the gardening and look after our vegetable patch. Three times a week I travel into the city and sell the street paper. I don’t drink alcohol anymore, receive treatment at a tuberculosis clinic and have the opportunity to see my children. They are already grown up and have forgiven me for my former sins.

### My working day

I get up at the crack of dawn at 6 a.m. I go outside, feed our pets and leave

for the city to the editor’s office where I collect the paper The Way Home and go about my daily route. Usually I sell beside the market “Privoz” where there are always lots of people who buy from me. A few know me and always ask for the new edition of the paper.

I enjoy the work – I’m not just selling a newspaper but I’m also meeting homeless people and telling them whether they can receive help. There was a time when I needed this advice myself, therefore it’s good to know what living under the stars is really like. After that, when I have sold all of the papers, I get the bus back home.

### The alternative ending

I don’t know what would have happened to me if I hadn’t asked for help at The Way Home. I probably would have drunk and then died in some basement somewhere. Thanks to the editors of the street paper who believed in me and gave me work, I have managed to change my life.

When I stood at the crossroads – at the choice between life and meaningless existence – I chose life. I received help and support which I could not have survived without. Now everything is going well for me, and I myself am starting to help people who have also fallen into difficult situations.

Translated from Russian into English by Amy Fox.

Source: [www.streetnewsservice.org](http://www.streetnewsservice.org)

## Bright future for Big Issue’s South African vendors

By Tarryn Brien

For two vendors of The Big Issue in South Africa, selling a street paper did more to put food in their bellies and money in their pockets; it gave them a new start in life and allowed them to go from poverty to proving their potential and fulfilling their dreams. For Cynthia Gogotya, generous donations from readers, touched by her determination to help others, paid for the tuition fees she needed to study social care, while her fellow vendor Olwethu Dyabooi has gone from selling a The Big Issue paper and dancing on street corners to shaking his stuff abroad in the Arab nation of Oman’s capital.

### Study gift for would-be social worker: Cynthia Gogotya

“I can hardly express the joy and gratitude I feel,” says a shocked and emotional Cynthia Gogotya after learning of the flood of donations from readers to support her dream of becoming a social worker.



With the help of Big Issue readers Cynthia Gogotya is studying to become a social worker. Photo: The Big Issue South Africa

In the March 9 edition, the 46-year-old vendor told how she had completed her Matric after her 40th birthday, gone on to complete a series of short courses and now planned to fulfill her long-time ambition of studying social work. She signed up for a course through Unisa early in the year, but had been unable to begin her studies, as she couldn’t pay the registration fees.

Touched by Cynthia’s determination and her goal of dedicating her life to helping others in her community, several readers responded and together donated just under R12000 – enough to pay Cynthia’s registration fees and tuition for her first year of studies, with some left over for books and other study equipment.

“I am still shocked that this is all happening so fast,” she says. “I never expected a response like this. I thought, at best, I would be able to raise the registration fees. To know I can now study without having to worry about the first

year’s tuition makes me so happy.”

Donations were made by Mary Look, Ross Wilson, the Kirstenbosch Lion’s Club and Prof Keaton, while the key funding came from the We-Are-Lucky project.

The We-Are-Lucky project was started by an anonymous donor who decided to give £1,000 to a complete stranger on the basis that they, in turn, do something good with the money. Based on the pay-it-forward concept, people who join the We-Are-Lucky project give the same amount – or as close to it as possible – to a person of their choice anonymously, in cash and with no strings attached.

“I had never seen so many notes before, I couldn’t help but cry,” says Cynthia of receiving the donation from We-Are-Lucky.

Cynthia, who will continue selling the

see BIG BREAKS, page 14



## Greeks forgo winter heating after jump in fuel tax

by Karolina Tagaris  
Reuters, 2/11/2013

Greek cleaner Eleni Daneel's family spends evenings in their Athens home bundled up in coats after a steep rise in fuel prices made heating their apartment an unaffordable luxury this winter.

Daneel is one of a growing number struggling to keep warm after a fuel tax hike aimed at curbing smuggling and boosting revenues for the cash-strapped state sent heating oil prices up 40 percent.

With Greeks already struggling under wage and pension cuts imposed by the foreign lenders that bailed their country out, many have stopped using heating oil altogether, pushing consumption down 70 percent in the last three months of 2012 from a year earlier.

"Some cry, others swear. I've never experienced anything like this before, not being able to keep warm," said Daneel, 57, who supports her unemployed children and bed-ridden husband with her 400-euro monthly salary. "Why aren't we allowed to live a dignified life?"

Weather in Greece may be milder than in northern Europe, but temperatures still drop below freezing in some coastal areas – a rare snowfall blanketed Athens last month – while mountainous and northern regions are covered in snow through the winter.

Revenues from the tax rose to 120 million euros over the period from 73 million previously, but was a long way short of the 277 million euro government target because of the dramatic drop in consumption.

Finance Minister Yannis Stournaras, however, has refused to row back on the tax hike, saying that aligning heating oil and car fuel taxes eliminates smuggling and that additional revenue for state coffers was secondary.

By harmonising the taxes, the government eliminated the motive for suppliers to mix cheap heating oil with car fuel and reap huge illegal profits from consumers.

A state fuel subsidy for the poor has gone largely uncollected as apartment building residents who are entitled to the subsidy cannot always convince neighbours who are not entitled to it to buy heating oil for the whole building.

### Return of the Athens Smog

Higher fuel prices have helped spawn a set of unintended consequences – from illegal logging for firewood in the countryside to a wood-smoke smog appearing over Athens.

The impact is especially dramatic in the Greek capital, where tenants in both wealthy and poorer neighbourhoods have mostly opted not to turn on their apartment buildings' central heating system.

About 95 percent of Athens apartment buildings bought no heating fuel this winter, said Yorgos Giortas, who heads an association of Athens building supervisors. Even the office building where he works, an eight-storey block tenanted by law firms and accountants on a busy street in central Athens, switched off the heating this year to avoid the 2,600 euro monthly oil bill.

"This is the first winter in 32 years that we haven't turned the heating on," Giortas said. "Now they sit around with their coats on, or use the air-conditioning."

Further away in a residential suburb of Athens, Apostolos Mastouropoulos has turned to his largely decorative fireplace to keep warm. But it is so poorly constructed that most of the smoke fills his apartment.

"I'm outraged," said Mastouropoulos, complaining it would cost 200 euros a month to heat his home with oil but only 40 euros with firewood.

"I'm finding it very hard to adapt to this reality, just because some politicians decided it for us," said Mastouropoulos, whose wife and two adult sons are unemployed.

So dramatic is the surge in the use of wood stoves and poorly functioning fireplaces that a hazy blanket of smog has crept up over the city's skyline, and the smell of ash hangs in the evening air.

The return of the Athens smog – last seen in the 80s and 90s before the state subsidised cars with catalytic converters – has set off alarm bells among environmental groups and officials worried about potential health risks for the public.

Researchers at the National Observatory of Athens said polluting and harmful particles that can cause respiratory problems have reached almost five times the danger level some nights this year.



Diana Mastouropoulou sits next to a fireplace during an interview with Reuters in her house in the Petroupoli suburb, west of Athens February 3. Photo: REUTERS/Yorgos Karahalios

The smog contains sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and other carcinogens, and was measured at 241 mg per cubic metre on January 9, compared with a danger level of 50 mg.

### "Wild West"

For a growing number of Greeks, buying firewood, which can cost 260 euros to get an average household through three months of winter, is difficult, is also more than they can manage, even if it is a quarter of the equivalent heating oil bill.

That has meant a surge in illegal logging in areas like the rugged forest on Mount Egaleo in western Athens, where environmentalists have started patrols in search of offenders.

Clad in bright orange vests, a team of about 15 men, often volunteers, drive jeeps across the mountain, seeking potential loggers and listening for the sound of electric chainsaws.

"Ninety percent of the time it's people who are suffering from the economic crisis who need to keep themselves and their families warm," said Grigoris Gourdomichalis, head of an environmental group run by municipalities.

"I can see where they're coming from. You can't let your small child, or a sick person, or the elderly, go cold," he said, flashing his torchlight on the stumps of three pine trees cut down earlier in the day.

Without powers to arrest, the patrols are largely aimed at preventing illegal felling and can sometimes turn dangerous when loggers turn on the patrollers with knives or guns, he said.

"It's a bit like the Wild West here," Gourdomichalis said. "There's just such poverty and misery and unemployment."

Source: [www.streetnewsservice.org](http://www.streetnewsservice.org)

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## Deep concerns over Hungarian government's homelessness law



A homeless woman rests in a sleeping bag on a mattress in one of the public parks in Budapest.

FEANTSA, 3/13/2013

On the 11th of March, the Hungarian government voted an amendment that inscribed the criminalisation of homelessness in the country's Constitution. FEANTSA is deeply concerned by this amendment, which writes the prosecution of homeless people for living in public spaces into the law.

FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working With the Homeless) urges the Hungarian government to respect the decision of its Constitutional Court to strike down the law in November of 2012 and calls on the European Union and the international community to take action in response to this vote.

Despite international pressure and

protests at home, the Hungarian Parliament has voted in a constitutional reform that makes it possible to ban people from 'habitually residing in public places.' The amendment to the Constitution follows the Constitutional Court's abolition in 2012 of provisions in the Petty Offences Act that criminalised homelessness, stating that criminalising homelessness is unconstitutional, as it violates human dignity:

"[N]either the removal of homeless persons from public premises, nor urging them to take up social assistance, may be considered a legitimate constitutional aim that would substantiate the declaration of homeless persons' living on public premises a petty offence. Homelessness is a social problem that should be dealt with by the state by means of social intervention and social assistance rather than punishment. It is incompatible with the protection of human dignity as enshrined in Article II of the Fundamental Law to declare [homeless persons] dangerous to the society and punish [them]."

Homelessness is a violation of fundamental human rights and

dignity that continues to affect people in all EU Member States. It is one of the clearest indicators of deepening poverty and social exclusion. It has far-reaching implications, both for the individuals who experience it and for the society at large. FEANTSA thus calls on the European and international community to concentrate efforts to take action in response to this vote, and thus uphold the values that underpin the EU, including respect for human dignity (part 2 of the Lisbon Treaty) and remind Hungary of its obligations to maintain rule of law and democracy and protect human rights as enshrined in the international treaties to which Hungary is signatory, including the Revised European Social Charter, the European Convention

on Human Rights, the UN Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

FEANTSA also calls on the Hungarian President, János Áder, as guardian of democracy and rule of law in the country, to veto the amendment criminalising homelessness.

Instead, Hungary could put in place a homelessness strategy offering real supported housing options for homeless people, either in social rental properties or in supported housing on the private rental market. These measures can be successful, even in times of economic crisis, and are not more expensive than using police and the justice system to fine, arrest and imprison homeless people. Plus, they work.

FEANTSA President, Rina Beers, said "Criminalising homeless people is not the answer. Criminalisation measures are cruel and ineffective, since they aim to remove the visible aspect of homelessness from public view rather than offering any real solution. FEANTSA urges the Hungarian government to withdraw its amendment that writes the potential for human rights violations into the Constitution and to work instead towards developing a homelessness strategy as a positive and effective way of putting an end to this unacceptable situation."

### The City is for All

In light of the developments in Hungary, grassroots organisation The City is for All emerged. The organisation says: "We have fought hard against the criminalization of homelessness since the idea of such a law was born in 2010. Despite our struggles and against great public resistance and international pressure, the Hungarian Parliament went ahead and adopted this inhumane and anti-democratic law. As a last resort, The City is for All has sent an open letter to the President of the Republic reminding him of his responsibility to every Hungarian citizen, including homeless people, and asking him to veto the law."

Source: [www.streetnewsservice.org](http://www.streetnewsservice.org)

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## Robot & Frank coming to you – can robots care?

by Adam Forest  
The Big Issue UK,

Imagine for a moment a small, silver robot zipping around your home, serving up chicken noodle soup, running the bath and letting you know about a forthcoming dental appointment. Does the prospect sound strange and frightening or agreeably convenient? Would you want to kick the little fella out the door or pat him on the head and call him Stevie?

These sorts of question may seem mere idle speculation, but they in fact reflect the imminent choices facing everyone with a stake in social care – which is, let's face it, all of us. In Japan, the future has already arrived. The challenges of a rapidly aging population (22 percent of Japanese people are aged 65 or over and the figure will rise to 39 percent by 2050) mean an army of shiny robot caregivers is now in development.

Billions of yen have already been spent trying out friendly-faced devices that lift, feed or bathe. Toyota vice-chairman Katsuaki Watanabe insists robots will be integral to his company (which is now testing them at hospitals in Tokyo), and the Japanese government has set aside ¥7.6bn (£58m, or \$81m) to get more artificial helpers into the home.

Britain is facing its own demographic time bomb. Earlier this month, the government acknowledged the enormous burden families face in covering the cost of long-term care of loved ones and announced plans to introduce means-tested caps on the amount each family spends.

Residential care homes are often the most expensive option. Could a new wave of enhanced-function robots allow people to remain at home alone for a longer period? Could a cash-strapped National Health Service, bruised by details of failure in Staffordshire, benefit from bringing in automatons programmed to provide specialist support?

In the United States, there is huge interest in exploring the potential for socially assistive robots (SARs). A recent (2012) quasi sci-fi comedy film called *Robot & Frank* details the friendship between a lonely career criminal, played by Frank Langella, and an ingenious automated “care-bot” his son sends in a box.

The film challenges the viewer to wonder whether an android assistant could ever really replace familial ties. What are the ethics of palming off dotage-weary parents with a toy? What if the toy was really useful and efficient?

Although director Jake Schreier set the

film in the near future, his choice of fictional robot was inspired by the current crop of real-life Japanese elder care robots that resemble “little white spacemen.” Despite the creepy blank face and flat, neutral voice – despite declining to even give the robot a name – Schreier knew audiences would still fall in love with a walking box of nuts and bolts.

“We’re so good at projecting emotions on to inanimate objects,” he says. “Humans will ascribe emotion to a toaster.”

Robotics companies are keen to emphasize the merit in giving older people a companion able to help organize all other social interactions. Kompai, a service drone that acts as a video conferencing tool and secretary, is in trials with the French firm Robosoft.

Concerned family members can call the robot via Skype. The robot then uses ultrasonic sensors to detect the location of its master and presents him or her with the active screen and multi-touch tablet. Kompai also reminds its master of appointments and updates shopping lists.

“Robotic support of the infirm and elderly has got to be aimed at improving the quality of life,” says Geoff Pegman, managing director at British robot manufacturer RU Robots. “It should not just be used for governments to save money in caring for them.”

Others are not so convinced care-bots are capable of anything particularly special. Professor Noel Sharkey, a former judge on TV series *Robot Wars*, spent a lot of his early academic life trying to devise a computer program that could conduct meaningful interaction with a human being.

He discovered robots are really crap at conversation, as anyone who has asked their iPhone’s Siri whether he likes The Smiths will know (“This is about you, not me... would you like me to search Google for The Smiths?”).

Sharkey describes the progress of the robot elder care industry as “really concerning.” We are, he says, expecting far too much of the devices we program. “Every time we have another scandal in a care home, people



in the robotics world will be tempted to say, ‘There you are, you see, a robot wouldn’t do such horrible things.’ But at the moment a robot cannot do much of anything complicated or difficult. You could spend the money better improving what humans provide in terms of care.”

Sharkey outlines just some of the difficulties when human beings are detached from the process. “A robot with cameras looking after someone might be able to provide a sense of security, but what happens if people are watching remotely? Supposing you’re having a robot help you into the bath: who’s on the other side of the camera? How do you know they’re not sniggering at a distance? What happens if the system breaks down? Human contact and the sensitivity that should come with it are always very important.

“The whole practice of care is really a human job,” he adds. “If robots are going to be used in some way, it’s very important the elderly person makes the decisions about what it is they actually want. It all needs to be used very wisely and carefully.”

Others worry about the strange attachments people might form with inanimate machines. The Paro seal is a pet robot sold in Japan, where they are used in nursing homes and hospitals to stimulate affection in recovering patients. Paro can grow active or sleepy; show pleasure when stroked or patted. Professor Sherry Turkle, who works on the social studies of science and technology at MIT, describes the cruelty in deceiving people to “love objects that can’t love them back.”

And yet robots may still prove too effective to ignore, if we are able to clearly distinguish what they can and cannot offer. At the University of Hertfordshire, Professor Kerstin Dautenhahn is leading the Aurora project, exploring how robots such as Kaspar can become therapeutic toys for children with autism.

Struggling to make sense of the

emotional subtleties of their friends and even family, young children with autism are taught to sit down with Kaspar to learn some very basic interactions. Being able to test out responses with a smiling (or sad) humanoid appears to ease their social anxiety.

“The idea is not to replace human contact – people get very upset about that idea – but a robot can be tool, a social mediator,” Dautenhahn explains. “We didn’t use a cartoon-like face for Kaspar because the gap between a human face and cartoon face would be too big.

“At the same time, we knew we wanted to show Kaspar’s workings from the neck down, to show it’s something that has been programmed, not a human, not another child. It’s a very simplified version of the human face, with a restricted set of simplified expressions.”

Does Dautenhahn worry about humans relying too heavily on robots for attention and affection? “Of course, people do tend to anthropomorphize. I can see the danger in not being able to draw the line, particularly with vulnerable people like the elderly. The boundaries between reality and their emotional investment might get blurred, and we are right to ask questions and be cautious about it.

“But then again, there is an argument that goes: why shouldn’t the elderly have an extra friend if they want? Some caregivers say, ‘I only have a few minutes each day for social interaction.’ So some caregivers see the value in it. It’s problematic. As a society, it’s up to us all to decide what we want, not just the companies who make the robots.”

One day, not so very far in the future, a robot might be able to tuck you up in bed with a cup of tea. But it won’t be able to kiss you goodnight, or even offer a proper hug. The immaculate machines may soon be here to assist, but surely nothing can replace the help human beings can offer each other, for all our flaws and imperfections.



# Old age far from gentle for Japan's greying homeless

by Teppei Kasai  
Reuters, 3/01/2013

Kyoko Machiya should be enjoying life with grandchildren. Instead, the 64-year-old's home is a makeshift structure of boxes covered with blue plastic in a Tokyo park. Homelessness in Japan is a decades-old issue, yet it has a worrying new twist. A vast majority of the homeless are now aging, a reflection of the overall greying of Japanese society that poses new problems for policy makers.

Machiya, a tiny woman with weathered skin and greying hair, tried a shelter once but eventually moved out.

"It's not their fault, but it's pretty difficult being surrounded by those with severe mental illnesses," Machiya said. "It wasn't a pleasant environment, so I ended up on the streets again."

Machiya's situation is, sadly, far from unusual.

The number of homeless in Japan has fallen sharply in nearly 5 years, to 9,576 in 2012 from 18,564 in 2007, according to Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

But those in higher age groups – 55 years old and above – have surged to 73.5 percent in 2012 from 58.8 percent in 2003.

Part of the problem is simple demographics, activists said – like the rest of Japan, the homeless are getting older.

By 2060, two out of every five people in Japan will be aged 65 or older, with the population falling by 30 percent to below 90 million – the fastest aging among developed countries.

"Although the number of elderly homeless may be increasing, the homeless population was generally in their 50s and 60s to begin with," said Daisuke Kuroiwa, a member of Nojiren, a homeless support group.

About 53 percent of those in the higher age groups have been homeless for at least five years or longer – people like Toshiyuki Ishioka, who lives in the same park as Machiya.

"The company I used to work for went bankrupt, so I've been living on the streets for eight years now," said the 50-year-old, whose tanned, leathery skin made him look older than his age. "It's also difficult for older people like me to find jobs because we're just not as strong."



Homeless people take shelter on an underpass at a station in Tokyo. Photo: REUTERS/Yuya Shino

With Japan's unemployment rate as a whole hovering around 4.2 percent, competition is much stiffer for the day labour jobs on which many of the homeless have long depended and for which strength is critical, activists said.

Though the government's report said that many of the homeless chose to live that way and were managing to scrape by with money made from recycling cans they scrounged out of the trash, people at the NGOs painted a darker picture.

"Even if people can find jobs, they're usually short term contractual jobs, and sometimes they're back on the streets after a year or so," said Mitsuo Nakamura, a member of Aun, Asia Worker's Network. "Most of those that get employed tend to be young, so the elderly have a clear disadvantage."

**Giving up**  
Many older homeless have just given up. According to the report, 63.7 percent said they aren't looking for jobs, and don't plan to in the future, with 40.2 percent of those not seeking jobs giving sickness and old age as the main reasons.

Officials at the Health Ministry stressed that they were working with local non-profit organizations to provide shelters and self-support centers that helped with employment.

But these programs often involve a substantial amount of red tape and are based on job-hunting programs for mainstream job applicants, activists complain.

"During the application process, you're required to give a substantial amount of background information – particularly why you're homeless – because they're usually suspicious," said Kazuaki Kasai, with Shinjuku Renraku Kai, a volunteer support group. "It's quite humiliating."

As for shelters, plans to build them provoke fierce neighborhood resistance. The government of Tokyo runs five support centers and shelters, with room for 385 people.

## Children of Europe's debtor countries

by Claire Davenport  
Reuters, 2/13/2013

Almost a third of children in Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Italy and Spain have been pushed to the brink of poverty by austerity designed to bring down public debt, the global charity Caritas said last week.

Italy and eurozone countries that have received international loans are creating a generation of poorly-fed young people with low morale and few job prospects as the number of children at risk of poverty continues to rise, the charity said, citing EU statistics.

"This could be a recipe not just for one lost generation in Europe but for several lost generations," Caritas said.

Since 2010, Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain have received tens of billions in loans from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund in return for spending cutbacks and tax rises. Indebted Italy not received an international loan.

In all five of these countries the

Many just opt out, activists said.

"The homeless aren't applying for them because the majority require shared housing, which gives them no privacy, and they're given a time limit of six months to find a job or they get kicked out," Nakamura said.

"It's a pretty demanding process, especially for old people. Essentially, it's a rat race."

The real picture is likely worse. Both the government report and NGOs say the drop in visible homeless numbers could actually be due to many

vanishing from public parks and streets into places like 24-hour Internet cafes, where they sleep.

The hazards of being on the street are clear. A few weeks after Machiya spoke with Reuters, she had vanished from her home in the park – beaten and hospitalized, her fellow homeless said.

Source: [www.streetnewsservice.org](http://www.streetnewsservice.org)

increasing rate of children close to poverty coincides with the height of the crisis in 2008 and rises year-on-year to 2011. Statistics for 2012 are not yet available.

The charity blames children's growing impoverishment on family-unfriendly cuts to welfare, unemployment benefits, rising value-added tax and increased fuel duties.

"It has become an established fact that children are more at risk of poverty than any other demographic," Deirdre de Burca from Caritas said.

Figures from the European Commission show that in 2011, over 30 percent of children in Spain and Greece were at risk of poverty or exclusion, a four percentage point rise since 2005. In Portugal, that figure is just below a third, at 28.6 percent.

The 2011 figures for Ireland and Italy were not available. In 2010, however, 37.6 percent of children in Ireland and

see CHILDREN, page 12



## Pakistan – battle for women's rights

continued from page 4

my husband was ill. And when he died I wanted to do things myself for myself, but when I found I was not culturally permitted I was shocked.

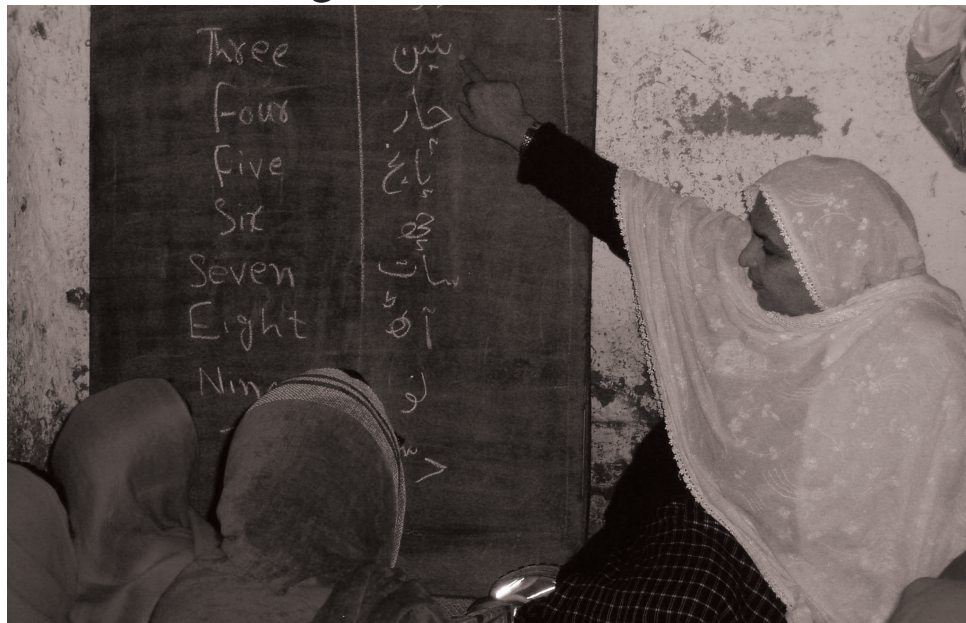
“So I established this organisation so that we women could take ownership of our own identity and bring about structural changes within the family and within the system.”

Bibi was born in Pakistan in 1950. As a third straight daughter, her arrival was not entirely welcomed by her illiterate mother or her family at large, who had prayed her entire pregnancy for a son.

But her mother's prayers were soon answered when, immediately after giving birth to Bibi, further labour contractions resulted in a twin brother who, unlike his baby sister, was welcomed into the world to the sound of celebratory gunshots.

Born into a society in which tribal feuds and protecting one's honour through acts of vengeance were a common part of everyday life, Bibi was forced to marry her schizophrenic cousin, who beat her often and kept her strictly veiled. But one day, after a visit by her younger sister, who had become a doctor, Bibi realised that as an educated woman herself she alone possessed the keys to her own liberation.

“I come from a tribal area where the literacy rate is very low and poverty is widespread,” said Bibi, who began her



Maryam with students in class during her visit to a girls school in Dora Safidiri.

long journey out of servitude by buying a buffalo with the idea of selling its milk.

“And it was education coupled with exposure to education that took me out from the vicious circle of poverty and ignorance. I see and experience every day how my very close relatives, cousins and also others – both men and women – who are illiterate and poor, are suffering mainly because they cannot read and write and so are excluded from the decent paid job market. They have serious health issues and are excluded from policy decision-making processes.”

Since its foundation, KK has grown from strength to strength. In 1993, Bibi

began KK with just four staff members, working from a single office in Peshawar. Today, KP Province is home to several functioning offices, and staff number in the hundreds.

Among its many noteworthy achievements, Bibi's organisation has established community-based primary schools for girls, adult literacy centres for women, trained young women in the villages as teachers, and introduced micro-credit schemes.

“We're currently working on a very interesting and important project for women to have rights to consent in marriage and rights to inheritance,” said Bibi, whose work regularly takes her across her native land and overseas. “Both these rights are largely denied in the most conservative and patriarchal societies of Pakistan and in our province of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). This is despite the fact that these and almost all human rights

are clearly given to them in Islam and in the Pakistan constitution.

“In this project we have engaged mosques, imams, lawyers, health practitioners and community leaders to have educative dialogues, seminars and community-village level women and men's group discussions.”

With her achievements came newfound friendships, and none more so than with the city of York. It was there in 2002 that the UK Friends of Khwendo Kor (FROK) was established to support the work of KK. And at the University of York Bibi completed an M.Phil in 2008 and was the proud recipient of an honorary doctorate last year.

Yet for Bibi, her personal transformation from subjugated tribal woman to international human rights activist of some repute will never truly sink in.

“Receiving an honorary doctorate from such a prestigious university as the University of York was not even in my remotest imagination,” explained Bibi, who lauds FROK in its “two-pronged agenda to support Khwendo Kor both technically and financially,” and in its wish to “develop a people-to-people understanding between both countries.”

“This honour has been overwhelming and has humbled me. Many times I cannot control my tears when I think of this honour and the grand ceremony of receiving it in front of more than a thousand highly educated people. The award has perplexed me – I truly feel I must do better but I don't know how to do better. But it has strengthened my belief in human values that are beyond race, origin, gender and culture.”

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er News vendors, especially vendors who have been suspended or terminated.

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## Children with bleak prospects

continued from page 11



A Greek boy, along with thousands of Greeks and foreign immigrants, line up during a free vegetable distribution. Photo: REUTERS/Yannis Behrakis.

28.9 percent in Italy were at risk of poverty or exclusion.

Children are defined as nearing poverty and exclusion if they live in families

with 60 percent or less of the median income, have parents with little or no employment, or lack basic essentials such as protein-rich foods, heating and clothes.

Caritas said governments must ask themselves what these trends will mean for children in the long run. Studies show children from poor households are more likely to

underperform at school and to struggle at finding or keeping jobs.

“They are looking at a future where the prospect of unemployment is stretching out ahead of them,” de Burca said.



## Music from the dust-bin

continued from page 3

Building musical instruments from recycled material resulted in original objects with beautiful sounds and increasing numbers of children and young people wanted to join the orchestra. The trouble was that the situations the young musicians' families faced, often stopped them from having instruments which held back their musical development. In addition, the need to improve their playing required daily practice with instruments.

"We saw ourselves with the dilemma of whether or not to give the few conventional instruments that we had to the children to take them home, with the risk they would be returned damaged or not at all... considering that a conventional violin costs more than the house of some of those children," Sánchez pointed out.

Inspired, in part, by the musicians and comedic actors from the Argentine comedy-musical group, Les Luthiers, they began to experiment. However, the first violin was not as functional as they had hoped. Nonetheless, it was useful to show them what worked and what did not. "The first instruments that we built were simpler and more basic than the



An artisan creates a violin from salvaged materials. Photo: Courtesy of Hecho en Buenos Aires

ones that we build now," he explains.

Sánchez says participating in the project "has taught them (the children) many values necessary to play an instrument in a group: discipline, responsibility, respect, social interaction, tolerance, perseverance, persistence, the desire to study, obedience, leadership, creativity, sensitivity, concentration and more." For Sanchez, the above list has helped shape the children's characters, distinguishing them in a community dealing with many problems

"There is a lot of drugs, alcohol, violence and child labour – many situations that you would think unsuitable for teaching values to children. However, they have a place in the orchestra, like an island within a community, a place where they can develop those values," he says.

Practice eventually led the innovative musical group to play live concerts and tour, which required a bigger commitment from parents. "For us, putting the children on stage not only involves putting them on a platform to play

their instruments, but it is fundamentally about making them and all of the problems that affect them visible," says Sánchez.

Faced with their first big trip abroad – a show in Buenos Aires – they realised the majority of the children did not have identification cards. "Some had not even been registered as having been born," Sánchez explained. Today, all have documentation including passports and this pushed siblings, neighbours and relatives of the children into doing the same.

Art is once again a tool used to change lives and Sánchez coined a phrase that perhaps sums up the spirit of the orchestra's experience: "The world sends us its waste. We give them back music." A proud Sánchez expressed in conclusion that, "these children are role models for others of their age that want to play music and stand out like them. The children in the orchestra know that to attain that they must study and work hard. That is why they have made having intelligence and talent fashionable, above and beyond mobile phones or clothes".

Translated by Stuart Taylor

## Reintegrating the responsible individual

continued from page 4

detention centres for women.

"The thinking is that there are so many men incarcerated in South Africa who have been the cause of so much pain and disruption in women's lives through domestic abuse and rape. So we believe South African women will greatly benefit from our focus on changing these men.

"People don't understand how I can see potential inside prisons. That's easy: South Africa has a prison population of around 160,000, and when inmates are released the chance of them re-offending is estimated to be as high as 80 percent. But if we invest in these prisoners and help them become catalysts of change, then we can significantly lower the re-offender rate," Andersen said.

### From violence to a fresh start

Franklin Esauesau used to be a criminal behind bars, but today he is a free man and a Responsibility Coach for the SmilingOne Foundation.

"I was introduced to the TRI programme while serving part of my eight-year prison sentence inside the maximum security section of Brandvlei Correctional Centre. I noticed there was a guy who inmates would go to for



Criminals transform through Karina Anderson's OFS

advice and I liked the way he talked openly and analysed the things he was told. I asked him if he was studying psychology but he shook his head and handed me Karina's book 'The Responsible Individual'.

"I decided that I should also invest in something that could help me integrate back into society, so in 2009 I entered the programme. I was immediately impressed because here were guys spilling out their guts to one another when the norm in prison is to act tough. I thought, geez, I kind of like this!

"The great thing about TRI is that you learn to identify who you have become and why. You work on breaking that

identity down so that you can then begin to heal and build yourself up into the type of person you'd like to be. As I progressed through the programme I discovered myself as a person, and I have stayed true to my transformation.

"The transformation is hard. When I entered into the programme, there were incidents of inmates spitting in my face and yelling at me and I knew that my friends in gangs were also disappointed that I had left them to join a programme. Then, as time went by, other inmates began to see me as someone they could talk to and escape the pressure of being in a gang for a few minutes.

"I began to facilitate TRI to other inmates as part of my responsibility coach education training when I was transferred to Brandvlei's medium-security section in 2010. I was also studying radio broadcasting by correspondence through INTEC College, so I was allowed to present a

daily show on the prison community radio station to complete the practical component of my course. I used this opportunity to share TRI via radio with 2,000 inmates and the wardens. When I returned each afternoon after doing the show other inmates would approach me and tell me how much they appreciated the broadcast.

"Before going to prison I was part of gang life for many years. As I progressed through TRI, being a criminal stopped appealing to me. I was living my life to the minimum by being in a gang but I'm no longer a minimum dreamer who lives for the gutter. Now I have goals and visions that are way more important than living a gang life: I'm a responsible individual and a resource for other people now. At the moment I facilitate TRI programmes in the Uitsig and Nyanga communities and I help with the reintegration and support of parolees. Many parolees don't have a support network to help them re-enter society, and they end up straight back in prison. I want to be able to help those guys because I understand the emotional turmoil they're going through."

Source: [www.streetnewsservice.org](http://www.streetnewsservice.org)



## Big breaks, big dreams and bright futures

continued from page 7

magazine part time from her pitch on Breda Street in Gardens, can hardly wait to begin her studies on June 18. "I am so blessed and I will continue to help people in my community once I have qualified," she says. "I would like to thank all of my sponsors for their help and their faith in me. I will not disappoint them."

### Vendor dances his way to Oman: Olwethu Dyabooi

Selling The Big Issue puts food on the table for 20-year-old vendor Olwethu Dyabooi but his true passion is dance. So talented is he at his traditional form of umtyityimbo dance that Olwethu has, quite literally, danced his way from a street corner onto an aircraft and into the Arab nation of Oman.

When not selling the magazine, Olwethu performs around Cape Town with a group of umtyityimbo (meaning "shake the shoulders") dancers called the Tshezi's.

Olwethu began training in umtyityimbo dance at the age of 13. Mostly he learnt from watching others but later on received more formal training from Khayalethu Sylvester Pikini, who formed the Tshezi's.

"I really like the music we dance to," says Olwethu, "it's so lively and filled

with spirit you can't help but shake your shoulders."

The Tshezi's were performing in Sea Point when they were approached to join a collective of African dancers and musicians travelling to Oman to perform as part of a larger 90-minute African dance extravaganza, entitled Stars under the stars 2012, at the invitation of the country's Ministry of Tourism.

"I was nervous but excited," Olwethu says of his first time flying. "The flight was long but it was nice to be on top of the clouds."

Olwethu was not the only first-time flyer, says Beverley Gough, manager of African Jazz band Abavuki, who helped co-ordinate the Oman-bound troupe. "Roughly half of the 30 people had



While Olwethu Dyabooi sell The Big Issue South Africa on Capetown street corners, he is pursuing his dream of dancing. Photo, The Big Issue South Africa.

never been on an aeroplane before. But everyone handled the trip very well, even though we were delayed in Cape Town for four and a half hours which meant we missed our connection in Dubai."

The troupe eventually arrived in Oman's capital Muscat via Dubai and was put up in a hotel before travelling to Salalah where they stayed at a top-end resort.

Gough says the most striking part of the trip for many was that they were "treated like royalty".

"The staff really went out of their way to make us feel welcome, even preparing meals for us after midnight when we returned from rehearsals and the performance. As one of Olwethu's group remarked, "They treat us all with respect, even though we are poor."

Gough adds that Olwethu and his band-mates from the Tshezi's – called "the shakers" by the rest of the crew – were a delight to travel with.

"They were excited by the new experiences, and no whingeing or whining like you get from the more experienced travelers, particularly musicians."

Although Olwethu says it's good to be back home, he's been bit by the travel bug and is excited about the possibility of returning to Oman in June.

"I am so happy that I have travelled overseas; I couldn't stop bragging about it when I got back. The people in Oman didn't really understand the dancing but they enjoyed watching us perform. It is very different to South Africa but a very nice place. I am so excited that I may get to go back."

Until then, he can be found at his pitch on the corner of Long and Kloof Street in Cape Town's CBD.

## From football to family reunification

continued from page 2

These boys have been training for over three months now and have played matches with other teams who have been playing for many years. A lot has changed since then – most of all, their behaviour.

"They have certainly become less aggressive," said Maqbool.

Coach Haris Jadoon finds that the kids have been able to work on anger management issues to quite an extent. "When we started, I found them a much rowdier bunch, refusing to do their warm-up exercises or follow rules or even pay heed to the whistle. All they wanted to do was to get hold of the ball and start playing.

"Losing was unthinkable for them and throwing a tantrum, getting angry and crying was common. Slowly, however, they realised that it's a team sport and they can win only if they work as a team," he said.

He added: "Through the process of

the issue of street children and how these children survive, fending for themselves."

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"Losing was unthinkable for them and throwing a tantrum, getting angry and crying was common. Slowly, however, they realised that it's a team sport and they can win only if they work as a team," he said.

He added: "Through the process of teaching them the rules of the game, we teach them qualities like fairness, hard work, honesty, while building their confidence and communication skills."

Sadia Ahmed, a psychologist with AF, knows each boy well and says her job has been made much easier ever since the boys started playing football. "It's half my job done," she said. "They are much happier, easier to manage and more receptive to you. I also find many have grown taller and bigger in the last couple of months," she told IPS.

For Itfan, however, the biggest success has been that since they started playing, quite a number of the boys have been more amenable to reintegrating into family life, which is the ultimate aim of the foundation.

Owais Ali, 16, plays as a defender. He left home when he was seven. He says he got tired of being continuously hit by his parents. He returned home when he was 13, but "I have an older brother who had also run away before me and

has not returned," he said.

"It's a hard life out there," he said, reflecting on the realities of the street child experience. "You cannot imagine what a seven-year-old goes through on the streets of Karachi – he is harassed by street gangs and the police. Many are abused physically as well as sexually." Ali also confesses to having smoked hashish.

At the same time, the lure of a life free from family restrictions, poverty, school and housework is enough to make many want to continue where they are, Maqbool pointed out.

"We are trying to make them realise what it means to live within the folds of a family. Just like in sports, a family is like a team where each member takes care of the other and helps make the team a success. At the same time, parents too have to realise that these children need love, affection and respect. Both sides have to overcome their past and move on," said Maqbool.

Source: [www.streetnewsservice.org](http://www.streetnewsservice.org)



## Building a future through sweat-equity

by Mary Otto

Street Sense – USA (Washington, D.C.)

Kandis Jacobs, her husband Omar Martin and their three children moved to their apartment in December. On Christmas morning, the kids flew out of their beds to open the presents under the Christmas tree. After the days of joblessness, the homeless shelter and the transitional program, everything about that morning was stunning, magical, blessed.

“God is good,” says Jacobs, summing it up. Now they are starting a new year and a new life. They cherish everything about their three-bedroom apartment on Wayne Place in Southeast Washington: the comfy couch and beds; the bathroom they have all to themselves; the washer and dryer and the refrigerator decorated with a portrait of President Obama colored by their oldest son, Kamari, 6; the new stove where Jacobs cooks her tasty dinners.

And beyond the apartment’s fresh white walls, they cherish their neighbors who also live in the small neat brick building. They have developed strong bonds participating in a sweat-equity program that has given homeless families the chance to renovate a once-rundown property and make it home.

They are working toward a future they had trouble imagining when things seemed to be at their worst. For Jacobs and Martin, the troubles started back in 2009 when Martin lost his job as a security guard. The family eventually ended up at DC General, the old hospital the city uses as its homeless shelter, sleeping in a former hospital room and struggling to take care of other necessities with a monthly Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) check.

“It felt like the world was coming to an end,” Martin admits.

Yet it was there at the shelter that they found about the sweat equity pilot project, part of a larger effort by the city to move families out of homelessness and rethink a welfare program where some beneficiaries have languished for years. Central to the push is intensive casework geared toward getting poor parents the skills and work experience they need to move off of welfare and support their families.

But when Martin originally looked into the sweat equity pilot program he was wary.

It was the pay that worried him most, only about \$12.50 an hour. At his old job, as a guard, he had earned twice that much. This seemed like a step down in the world. But his wife told him they should give it a try.

“Baby we’re in the shelter,” Jacobs told him. “Something is better than nothing.”



Omar Martin, Kandis Jacobs, Michael Jackson and Cory McRae helped renovate their apartment building. Now they are planning for the future. Photo: Mary Otto

And the program turned out to offer other benefits as well. Once the sweat equity team had finished the work on the old city-owned apartment building, participants would have a chance to live there for three years. They would pay 30 percent of their incomes as rent. The money would be placed into an escrow account, to be matched three to one by the city. After three years, they would have a nest egg they could use to buy a home of their own, to go back to school or start a business.

“My beautiful wife is the reason that we are in the program,” says Martin, with a smile that takes in Jacobs on the couch, and their two younger children, Omar, 2, and Samarje, 3, who clamber and play about the living room and kitchen. “If I hadn’t listened to her we wouldn’t be here now.”

It took months of very hard work to get the place into shape, however. The building was in a sorry state. Martin and the rest of the crew, nine other men plus two women, had to gut the building and reconstruct it from the sewer pipes up. They regularly prayed to keep their courage up.

Now that they are in their homes, the members of the sweat equity crew have moved on to renovate a city-owned women’s shelter. They are continuing to hone their construction skills. They are taking courses. And they are steadily saving for the future.

Martin says he is looking forward to the day when he doesn’t need the \$602 monthly TANF check anymore. But he won’t forget the lessons he and his family learned surviving on welfare.

“You put yourself last, put God first and the children second,” sums up Martin. “They eat before you eat because that’s what it’s really for.”

What will he and his family do when the three years with the sweat equity program come to an end? How do they plan to invest their nest egg?

“The American Dream is to purchase

a home,” says Martin carefully. “My dream is to purchase a home and a business.”

He and a friend and neighbor from the sweat equity project, Michael Jackson, talk a lot about pooling their resources and perhaps buying and renovating another small apartment building, making homes for other families who need a new start in life.

Jackson, who, as if on cue, pops his head through Martin’s front door on this snowy morning, agrees.

They will have their own company.

“This is the CEO,” he says, pointing to

## Vietnam reassigns rude cops

by Hanoi Newsroom  
Reuters, 3/11/2013

Pot-bellied, short, or abusive traffic policemen will be barred from working on the streets of Vietnam’s capital and assigned desk jobs instead as Hanoi police try to clean up their unsavoury image.

The city’s traffic police are following the worst offenders closely and compiling lists of those to be reassigned. All police on traffic duty will be made to carry a book on the code of conduct to remind them how to behave, the official Tien Phong (Vanguard) newspaper said.

“Little officers, or those with too big a belly, will be moved to work in offices instead of guiding traffic and settling violations,” Colonel Dao Vinh Thang, head of the Hanoi Traffic Police Department, was quoted by Tien Phong as saying.

He said five teams of inspectors had been sent to monitor the behaviour of police on the street. Thang could not be reached for additional comment.

Tempers often flare in the city of 7 million famous for constant streams of motorcycles and sometimes haphazard driving. Complaints have mounted

Martin. “And I am the CFO.”

They are quite the pair when they get together, working and dreaming, and making one another laugh.

“My brother and I: We shared the same visions,” says Jackson. “We’re too much alike.”

Or as Martin sees it, different but compatible.

“We’re like peanut butter and jelly.”

They share a deep faith but beyond that, Martin admires the way Jackson is raising his kids by himself. Jackson and his son and his daughter slept in a van for a while before they ended up at DC General. They all made the best of it. But the thing the children, Erin, 9 and Michael Jr. missed most during their sojourn through homelessness was their dad’s wonderful cooking.

When they got moved in upstairs here on Wayne Place, the kids wanted a gingerbread house for Christmas, so Jackson built one for them.

“That man is Betty Crocker!” brags Martin, grateful to have a friend like Jackson, a fellow traveller taking the journey alongside him step by step. That’s how to rebuild your life, he says.

“It’s just like a home,” says Martin. “You’ve got to have the foundation first. Then everything else comes into place.”



about the conduct of traffic police, including allegations of corruption and abusive behaviour.

The latest initiative follows the deployment in January of female traffic police, all part of a campaign to improve the image of the security forces.

Crackdowns on overweight policemen have taken place in Thailand, Pakistan, Britain, Indonesia and the Philippines in recent years. Several of those countries ordered officers to get fit and lose weight before they could return to work.



## At home, and not at home

by Zak Brophy  
IPS, 3/12/2013

The influx of hundreds of thousands of war-weary refugees from Syria to Lebanon is putting an almost unbearable strain on many of the communities that have taken them into their homes. A domestic economic crisis, compounded by the arrival of such large numbers of refugees, is weighing heavily on many impoverished areas.

In recent months there has been a surge in the arrival of people fleeing Syria, with the number of refugees who receive assistance, or who have applied to receive assistance, doubling in less than three months to now exceed 320,000.

The Lebanese government claims there are up to a million Syrians in the country (including migrant workers and their families), among a native population of around 4.5 million people. Unlike Turkey and Jordan, Lebanon has no formal camps. Lebanese families host around a third of the refugees.

“We opened our doors and invited them in thinking they would be here for one or two months and there would be a quick transition in Syria like in the other Arab revolts. Now it is two years later and we are really struggling to manage,” Muhammad Sleiman Ikhlef told IPS. He has built three makeshift rooms with breezeblock walls, where he houses five Syrian families.

The cramped dwelling is in the Wadi Khaled area on the northern border with Syria, which has one of the highest densities of refugees in all of Lebanon. Before the uprising against the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad took root, Wadi Khaled had been a relatively poor but self-sustaining region. Now, not only do the local communities have to host thousands of refugees, but the economy in the region has ground to a halt.

“Our communities used to survive off the trade across the border, and smuggling. All of this has stopped. The economy has completely retreated; there is no trade, no activity and no

employment,” said Ali al-Beddawi, community leader in Rami, one of the Wadi Khaled villages just a couple hundred metres from the Syrian border.

In addition to the burden of the refugee influx and the collapse in trade activity, the loss of Lebanese-owned businesses within Syria has also exacerbated the malaise in the region.

Al-Beddawi used to have a successful cosmetics factory in the Syrian city Homs, only 23 kilometres from Wadi Khaled, “but it has all been reduced to zero,” he said. He estimated there are at least 50 other businessmen from the region who have lost their enterprises and investments in Syria, cutting off an economic lifeline for much of the surrounding community.

The majority of the aid and assistance has, to date, been directed towards the refugees. This has created some resentment, as they have become integrated into Lebanese communities that are in many cases also suffering from poverty and instability.

“We can’t blame the Syrians for being here,” said a young man at the village store in Rami. “They are fleeing oppression, but life is unbearable for us Lebanese here and we get no support, while they have the UN and foreign agencies and everybody else supporting them.”

In recent months there have been some shifts towards supporting Lebanese host communities. For over a year, Ikhlef received no assistance for, and accepted no rent from, the Syrian families he provided a home for in Wadi Khaled. However, over the past three months the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has been helping to cover the costs of housing the refugees. “This is a huge weight off my shoulders and makes it somehow bearable,” Ikhlef said.

Since September 2012 the SDC has



Muhammad Sleiman Ikhlef with two of his children and a child (on the right) from one of the families he is hosting. Photo: Brophy/IPS

provided the equivalent of 676,750 euros to 1,300 host families in Lebanon as part of its Support For Hosting project. Each host family receives the equivalent of \$100 per month if they are accommodating two to ten people and 150 dollars per month for 11 people or more, in addition to \$100 per month to mitigate local economic hardships.

“In terms of cost-effectiveness, reducing further displacement and ensuring refugees have access to some kind of normalcy, being hosted in someone’s house seems to be the most valid option,” SDC director of cooperation Heba Hage-Felder told IPS. The SDC figure that their initiative has enabled 10,000 Syrian refugee families to stay in the homes of host families. They intend to extend the reach to 15,000 families in the April to September period.

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and some of the other major international aid organisations have similarly started to turn their efforts towards sustaining the homes and communities of those Lebanese who have opened their doors

to fleeing Syrians.

“We all recognise the importance of building on this tradition of hospitality and making it sustainable,” said Hage-Felder.

The Syrian crisis is a highly divisive issue in Lebanon and the government has till recently come up with no strategies on issues such as the durability of host communities. “The Lebanese government hasn’t offered any support and has been completely absent from dealing with this huge crisis we are facing in the region,” said Al-Beddawi.

But with the economic and social strains reaching critical levels in some districts the government has launched the Lebanese Host Communities Support Programme in partnership with UNDP.

Robert Watkins, resident representative of the UNDP said, “More than anywhere else, the safety and livelihood security of refugees in Lebanon is inseparable from that of their hosts.”

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